

PATRISTIC FATHERS
SELECTED VIEWS OF THE PATRISTIC FATHERS ON CELIBACY
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Clement of Rome (died in First Century)—

The womb of a holy virgin carried our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and the body which our Lord wore, and in which He carried on the conflict in this world, He put on from a holy virgin. From this, therefore, understand the greatness and dignity of virginity. (*First Epistle on Virginity*, Chapter 6).

Ignatius of Antioch (d. circa 108 A.D.)—

“if anyone is able to remain continent, to the honor of the Flesh of the Lord, let him persistently avoid boasting.” (*Ignatius to Polycarp*, Para. 5).

Justin Marty (d. 165 A.D.)—

“And many, both men and women, who have been Christ’s disciples from childhood, have preserved their purity at the age of sixty and seventy years; and I am proud that I could produce such from every race of men and women.” (*Apology* 1, n.15)

Tertullian (d. 220 A.D.)—Tertullian was married to a Christian wife. Tertullian did not believe that women should preach or teach in the church, but they could prophesy.

Thou therefore that art a Christian , do not imitate such women; but thou wouldst be a faithful women, please thy husband only. And when thou walkest in the street, cover thy head with a robe, that by reason of thy veil thy great beauty may be hidden. And adorn not thy natural face; but walk with downcast looks, being veiled. (*Didascalica Apostolorum*, Chapt. III).

Do you not realize that Eve is you? The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil’s gateway, you desecrated that fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child’s play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die! (*De Cultu Feminarum*)

Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 A.D.)—

But chastity maintains the first rank in virgins, the second in those who are continent, the third in the case of wedlock. Yet in all it is glorious, with all its degrees. For even to maintain the marriage-faith is a matter of praise in the midst of so many bodily strifes; and to have determined on a limit in marriage defined by continency is more virtuous still, because herein even lawful things are refused. Assuredly to have guarded one’s purity from the womb, and to have kept oneself an infant even to old age throughout the whole of life, is certainly the part of

an admirable virtue; only that if never to have known the body's seductive capacities is the greater blessedness, to have overcome them when once known is the greater virtue; yet still in such a sort that virtue comes of God's gift, although it manifests itself to men in their members. (*Of the Discipline and Advantage of Chastity*, 4).

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 A.D.)—

“It is fitting, according to Scripture, that a bishop be the husband of an only wife. But this being understood, it behoves consecrated men, and those who are at the service of God’s cult, to abstain thereafter from conjugal intercourse with their wives. (*Demonstratio Evangelicam* 1,9)

Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386)—

While you maintain perfect chastity do not hold vain counsel against those who walk a humbler path in matrimony. Let those who are married and use their marriage properly be of good cheer who enter marriage lawfully and not out of wantonness... who recognize periods of continence so that they may give themselves to prayer... who have embarked upon the matrimonial estate for the procreation of children, not for the sake of indulgence. (*Catechetical Lectures 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol 7*)

Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389)—

We do not dishonor marriage because we give a higher honour to virginity. I will imitate Christ, the pure Groomsman and Bridegroom, as He both wrought a miracle at a wedding and honors wedlock at His Presence. (*Oration 40, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*).

Interestingly Gregory was converted to Christianity by his wife Nona and had three children by her all who became saints of the church. One of the sons of Nona and Gregory Nazianzen was Gregory the Theologian who wrote this about his mother: “My mother was a worthy companion for such a man [as my father] and her qualities were as great as his. She came from a pious family, but was even more pious than they. Though in her body she was but a woman, in her spirit she was above all men... Her mouth knew nothing but the truth, but in her modesty she was silent about those deeds which brought her glory. She was guided by the fear of God.”

Gregory of Nyssa (d. circa 395)—

Gregory of Nyssa wrote a treatise on virginity entitled “*De Virginitate*”. In Chapter 3 of his work he deals with the pains of marriage. In Chapter 4 he concludes that all vices are found in marriage. In Chapter 12, he propounds that the rejection of marriage is the first step back toward an Edenic state. In Chapter 20 he concludes that one can not pursue a happy married life and the spiritual relationship with God at the same time. Gregory had been married before he renounced marriage.

Ambrose (d. 397)—

But you know that the ministerial office must be kept pure and unspotted, and must not be defiled by conjugal intercourse; you know this, I say, who have received the gift of the sacred ministry, with pure bodies, and unspoiled modesty, and without ever having enjoyed conjugal intercourse. (*Duties of the Clergy*, Bk. I, Ch. 50, par 258).

Epiphanius (d. 403)—

Since the Incarnation of Christ, the holy Word of God does not admit to the priesthood monogamists who, after the death of their wives, have contracted a second marriage, because of the exceptional honor of the priesthood. And it is observed by the Holy Church of God with great exactitude and without fail. But the man who continues to live with his wife and to generate children is not admitted by the Church as a deacon, priest, or bishop, even if he is the husband of an only wife... (*Panarion (Adversus Haereses)*).

Jerome (d. 420 A.D.)—

Jerome wrote a treatise called "The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary." The purpose of the treatise was to oppose the views of Helvidius, who wrote a lost work some time before 383 which was opposed to the perpetual virginity of Mary and which took the position that the "brothers" and "sisters" of Christ were exactly that as opposed to half-brothers and sisters or cousins.

But we might say regarding Peter, that he had a mother-in-law when he believed, and no longer had a wife. (*Against Jovianus*, Book 1, Par. 26).

But where there is something good and something better, the reward is not in both cases the same, and where the reward is not one and the same, there of course the gifts are different. The difference, then, between marriage and virginity is as great as that between not sinning and doing well; nay rather, to speak less harshly, as great as between good and better. (*Against Jovianus*, Book 1.)

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 A.D.)—

"...we also admonished and warned the virgins of Christ that they must not because of the superiority of the more perfect gift which they have received from on high, despise, by comparison with themselves, the fathers and mothers of the people of God; and because of that, because by divine law continence is preferred to matrimony, and holy virginity to wedlock." (*De Sancta Virginitate*)